

RUNNING of A MUDLARK

By Curran
Richard Greenley

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And with a sure aim he bunched the bridle and flung it to the judge. At the lad's first word there had been a commotion down there among the crowd of grooms in the paddock. A lithe, black form darted across the course and made for the outer gate. A dozen men seized him at once and then held their breath for the next move in the play.

Old Colonel Cantwell, the judge, stood up and waved for silence. "Bring him another bridle. I'll take care of this one. Now get to the post." Jim settled in the saddle. Ahead of him the little flags danced in the wind and rain. Garrison's Black Seraph wheeled into Bareshanks, and at the end of the line Morgan's Timber Wolf plunged and reared. Three times the red flag fell, three times they struggled back to the post. Then red down, yellow down and a whirl of black, bay sorrel and gray swept away, nose and nose, with the rain dripping on flesh of scarlet and blaze of gold.

"Mudlark!" "Old Skate!" It rang in his ears on the whistle of the wind. The first hurdle—Jim felt the long body gather itself, and they were over, leaving the Black Seraph a bulk adrift in the field. Timber Wolf led by a head. There were only four now. Jim grinded and lurched a little for ward as Bareshanks' great hoofs gripped the slippery grass. Grant's Derrydown was second, the long stride of English hunters showing its mettle from great-grandson to son Maxton's Red Ruin and Long's Wild Irishman nose and nose with Bareshanks. Up the slope and over the second hurdle, the great shoulders working with a mighty come and go, Bareshanks forged on, while the Wild Irishman dropped in a heap to scramble out with a wrenched fore leg. Jim laughed aloud as they swept the turn. The third—he had studied it well and knew the rotten bank, where the Timber Wolf landed, struggled a moment and slid down, his fore legs fighting the air. They were close together now, Derrydown first by a shoulder length, Bareshanks next, his ugly, lean head stretched out, with red nostrils wide astare, and Red Ruin straggling a sorry third.

Over and over the course went Bareshanks and Jim, while at the stables, in the doorway of Mayer Bros.' quarters, a man stood peering through field glasses at the brown blur that swept around the field.

Jim slipped to the ground, the sweat pouring from horse and boy alike. Joe, his sulky face hid under the peak of his cap, gave him a sly glance as he blanketed the horse and led him inside. Jim turned with a question in his eyes to the man who stood pulling his gray mustache and looking away into space. Jim twitched his sleeve, and he looked down into the small, pinched face, its very eagerness rendering it thinner and more pathetic, and answered the unspoken query.

"Yes; he'll do. In for a penny, in for a pound; but if he fails I'll see that you get back to the old farm, all right."

"And him"—Jim pointed to where the bony nose showed through the open door.

The man laughed shortly. "A bullet through his ugly head." The boy shrank back and slipped through the door. Unperceived, he curled down in the straw almost at the feet of Bareshanks, who munched contentedly at his provender.

Other eyes had watched that morning gallop. Joe, the groom, had finished the rubbing down when, with an eye on the silent figure outside the door, he snatched from its nail the bridle that Bareshanks must wear in the coming race, drew a bottle of colorless liquid from his pocket and poured a few drops over the bit. Bright eyes watched from the shadow of the feed box, and when Joe, his work done, disappeared Jim jerked the bridle down and smelled it. There was not the slightest scent. He hung the bridle back again and resumed his place between the horse's legs, a look of owlish gravity on the queer, pucker'd, old young face.

The hours wore on. Over the track, where a drizzling rain fell steadily, men went up and down in mackintoshes. Women in short skirts gathered in knots upon the grand stand, their eyes fever bright with excitement. The crowd grew steadily. Out there, where the little red flags, like points of flame, marked the zigzag of the hurdles, the old wagon drawn by the gray work horse stood loaded with the net, and a scurry of boys blew hither and thither in the wake of the different owners.

There had been wild work when Joe essayed to lead Bareshanks out. An old rope halter hung where the bridle should have been. Joe turned ashay. Jim stuck like a burr to Bareshanks and trailed at his heels in his patched and stained jacket, a mere apology for owner's colors. Neither horse, owner nor jockey was a favorite on the Downs. True to the primeval instinct, the rout was hostile to the shabby entourage. Nevertheless there was no open affront. Landon evidently possessed some kind of a pull with Mayer Bros.; hence his occupancy of one of their stalls and the grudging attendance of Joe.

Jim was ready to mount Bareshanks when the bell tapped, but as he passed the grand stand, still clinging to the old rope halter, the crowd yelled and rose as a man.

Off with the saddle and the weighing done, they were mounted again and filed before the grand stand. Bareshanks' ugly head reared above his fellows. They as they would have passed into the field a voice from the judges' stand halted them: "What's the matter with that boy on No. 5? That's no bridle. Where'd he get that halter?"

All eyes turned on Jim, who wheeled Bareshanks and rode to the front of the judges' stand, while up in the front row a man shook his fist at him and cursed savagely. The small figure straightened in the saddle and, with an appealing glance at the wall of faces, pulled a bridle, bit and all from the breast of his jacket. An intense silence fell as the childlike, treble rang out: "Boss, here's the bridle right enough, but I'd ride him with nothin' but a rope halter to Jericho before I'd let it go in his mouth. You can't smell nothin', en you can't see nothin'. But I was settin' down in the corner en s-sayin' nothin' when that black devil poured somethin' out of a bottle all over it, en when he was gone I just up en swiped it, en I hadn't let go of it since. You can see for yourself."

He Obeyed Orders.

Old world domestics make the best possible servants because they work like machines, never forgetting an order and doing exactly as they are told, without presuming to think for themselves. But once in awhile this literal adherence to duty produces some awkward results. An American woman living in India, with native servants, once told her butler to see that there was always a napkin at the bottom of the fruit dish, cake basket, etc., when these were brought to the table. The napkin was thereafter always seen in its place. But one day a tureen of vegetable soup was served, and the hostess began to wield the long, old fashioned silver ladle about in it. Something very like a fringed rag made its appearance in the first plateful. The butler was summoned to remove the dish. "It cannot be that the mem sahib found no napkin at the bottom," he hazarded, much distressed because of this unexplained disapproval, "for I myself placed there the largest one I could find."

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ESTATE OF CATHERINE RAYNER,

Puruant to the order of JOSEPH W. ELLON,

Surrogate of the County of Essex, this day

made on the application of the undersigned

executor of said deceased, notice is hereby

given to the creditors of said deceased to exhibit to the subscriber under oath or affirmation their claims and demands against the estate of CATHERINE RAYNER, deceased, from the date of her death until the date of this notice, or they will be forever barred from prosecuting or recovering the same against the subscriber.

EDWIN A. RAYNER.

February 17, 1903.

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